

Diversity in Schools: Facilitating Positive Interactions

Diversity in U.S. schools is accelerating. One reason is immigration. Immigration since 1965 has increased the nation's foreign-born population from 9.6 million to 45 million in 2015. By 2055, no racial or ethnic group will be in the majority (Pew Research Center, 2015). In K-12 education, African-American, Asian, Latino, and Native American students together already outnumber non-Hispanic white (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Other reasons include the efforts to mainstream students with disabilities and account for a wide range of other group and individual differences. Increased diversity presents schools with opportunities and challenges.

In a society, historical and on-going conditions related to social labeling create conditions where a person's race, sex/gender, social class, age, disability, etc., profoundly shape how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves and their world. For example, by conservative estimates many children who are socialized in the U.S. become aware of race as early as 3 years old. Thus, from an early age, explicit and implicit learning and development influences group identity, friendships, and social grouping. Over time, the impact can be beneficial (e.g., providing group social supports), but also can be harmful (e.g., conflicts arising from group competition for sparse resources). This brief resource highlights (a) the positives that can accrue as a student population diversifies, (b) ways to facilitate positive intergroup interactions, and (c) the necessity of being prepared to respond when intergroup conflicts arise.

Positives to be Accrued from Diversity in Schools

Schools offer society a unique opportunity to positively influence values and relationships at school and beyond. This can result from what is taught, how it is taught, and through the many interactions student have with each other and with school staff.

For example, research indicates that schools can improve outlooks and viewpoints concerning race relations, reduce negative racial stereotypes among young children, and develop interracial friendships. Students of color who attend more integrated schools tend to have access to improved educational resources and opportunities and environments stressing higher achievement. With specific respect to academic achievement and equity, research at racially diverse schools has reported improved critical thinking skills (e.g., the ability to understand and challenge different views). In addition, racially balanced schools are reported to have the smallest racial gap in achievement and the highest average achievement schoolwide.

Beyond school, potential outcomes are greater civic engagement, greater likelihood of residing in integrated neighborhoods and of maintaining regular interracial contacts, increased likelihood of working in an integrated environment, and of having positive experiences in the integrated workplace with more positive intergroup attitudes.

Facilitating Positive Intergroup Interactions

Research and experience indicate that positive intergroup cooperation can be facilitated through common goals and shared challenges. Such factors are seen as reducing conflicts of interest and this helps reduce intergroup distance and perceived group boundaries.

*The material in this document reflects work done by Yibing Yang as part of his involvement with the national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> Send comments to ltaylor@ucla.edu

In K-12 settings, teachers and staff can help facilitate positive intergroup relationships through cooperative learning activities. Research on cooperative learning indicates that not only does it promote better academic achievement, it does promote improved peer relations. And when a diverse group of students are involved in learning cooperatively, improved relations are reported among students from different racial/ethnic, gender, language proficiency, and economic backgrounds.

In terms of curricular content to facilitate positive intergroup relations, the emphasis is on multicultural education that stresses respect for cultural differences (e.g., diverse histories, values, socio-cultural practices and behaviors, ways of learning). Multicultural education is becoming an essential facet of a school's curriculum in the age of globalization; in schools serving diverse populations, it also can play a key role in promoting a healthy and safe school environment. It can be included as a formal unit or as activities included in other units.

And, of course, all efforts to facilitate positive intergroup interactions benefit from having a diverse staff in *all* personnel categories.

Examples of Classroom Activities for Enhancing Multicultural Appreciation

- (1) *The Sneetches* – Students experience discrimination and develop a sense of fairness and equity, apply literature to real life experiences, and become empowered to take responsibility for their environment. The activity includes reading *The Sneetches* by Dr. Suess, then the teacher randomly assigns students to two groups with obvious differing markings, give one group classroom privileges while denying the other, and then let the students discuss their experiences with the incident and share with the whole class. For more on this activity and others: <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/anti-racism-activity-sneetches>
- (2) *I am, you are, we are...* Students are taught to appreciate individual differences through noticing such differences in inanimate objects. Each student is assigned an inanimate object as their "friend" (e.g., potatoes). They are asked to introduce their "friends" to the whole class and describe certain physical characteristics ("My potato has a unique bump that is different from the other potatoes"). Then, the teacher places all the potatoes in a bag and lets the students discuss whether all the potatoes are the same or different, then encourages the students to pick out their own "friend" from the bag from the physical markers they described. For more on this activity and others: http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/anti-racism-activities/lesson_ideas/index_byage.html
- (3) *Portraying Diversity*: Students are taught to appreciate the contributions from different cultural groups to society as a whole. Students are asked to cut out pictures in magazines which depict popular aspects of social life such as food, music, fashion, sports, and art which originated from a culture different from their own. Then they are asked to make a collage of their cut-outs and discuss the contributions of various community in their society's way of life. For more, on this and other activities: <http://www.prejudicenoway.com/year3/2.5.html>
- (4) *This is Our House*: Students are taught how discrimination by physical characteristics is hurtful and are encouraged to be more inclusive in their own practices. Students are assigned to read *This is Our House* by Michael Rosen, a book about exclusion and tolerance. Then, they are encouraged to create their own cardboard boxes and have everyone go inside it. For more on this and other activities: http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/social-justice-activities-students.shtml

When Intergroup Conflicts Arise

Clearly, continued segregation and limited group representation in neighborhoods and schools is a fundamental barrier to attaining the benefits of diverse populations living, learning, and working together. At the same time, as school desegregation efforts over the years have demonstrated, intergroup conflicts are inevitable. As a result, schools must be prepared to mitigate conflict.

Social Categorization Produces In- and Out-Groups

In general, students who identify or are identified with social categories denoting race, age, sex/gender, social class, disability, etc. widely are perceived as a “group” and stereotyped. Some are seen as an in-group, others as an out-group. Out-group individuals often experience dynamics which are harmful to them and are obstacles to a harmonious school climate. And because such social categories intersect, the dynamics within and between groups can be quite complex and conflictual.

Researchers studying the impact of grouping on intergroup dynamics report that students in competing groups quickly display biased attitudes (prejudice) and discriminatory behavior to each other. This tends to produce segregated social groups and intergroup conflict, especially in situations where the groups are in competition with each other.

Intergroup conflict resolution depends on the nature of the conflict itself, the resources available, and the ability of the interveners to meet the conflicting parties where they currently are in terms of motivation and capabilities. The ideal in addressing the deep social issues that are at the root of major intergroup conflict mitigation is to have a multifaceted community and school collaborative approach that stresses prevention and a quick and appropriate response when problems arise.

When collaboration with the community has not been well-established, the school must rely on the resources it has. If the school has stressed multicultural education, conflict resolution can be taught as part of the curriculum, and this can have a mitigating effect. Some school also prepare specific staff in conflict resolution practices, and some train students as peer mediators. And, in order to support students identified as struggling with emotions arising from intergroup conflicts, some schools provide for individual and small group counseling.

Conflict mitigation is aided when a school has been careful to ensure its policies are not perceived as biased against or as stereotyping any group. With respect to designated interveners, the process is facilitated when they have experienced such conflicts, been trained to respond, and are perceived as culturally aware and competent. They also need to be able to cope with their own biases and emotional reactions to such events.

Many practices have been suggested for conflict resolution in schools. These include negotiation, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, use of an ombudsperson, peacebuilding, reconciliation, restorative justice. Mediation and restorative justice are highlighted in the exhibit on the next page.

Note: From our perspective, conflict resolution and related counseling at schools is best addressed by embedding the practices into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf> .

About Conflict Resolution in Schools

As noted, many practices have been suggested for conflict resolution in schools (e.g., negotiation, mediation, conciliation, adjudication, use of an ombudsperson, peacebuilding, reconciliation, restorative justice). Two prominent examples are mediation and restorative justice.

Mediation is described as a conflict resolution process that contrasts with forms of conflict resolution where those in authority impose solutions or decisions. Rather, an impartial third party provides a structure for disputants to talk and listen to each other's grievances, take responsibility for the conflict, and formulate their own solutions. The emphasis is on problem solving and avoiding blame and punishment. The aim is to resolve the conflict through a process that empowers the parties and enhances mutual understanding.

(See <http://www.peacemakers.ca/publications/ADRdefinitions.html#mediation> ;
http://www.vadr.asn.au/mediation_in_schools.pdf)

Restorative Justice is being adopted/adapted by schools around the country. Here is how the Oakland Unified School District describes the approach (<http://www.ousd.org/Page/12328>):

“Restorative justice allows affected parties the opportunity to collectively define the impact and determine steps to make things as right as possible for everyone—the person(s) harmed, the person(s) who harmed others, and the broader community. Restorative justice takes incidents that might otherwise result in punishment and finds opportunities for students to recognize the impact of their behavior, understand their obligation to take responsibility for their actions, and take steps towards making things right.

Involving those affected is a cornerstone of restorative justice: restorative questions cannot be adequately answered without the involvement of those who have been most affected. Through this process, students learn how to manage their relationships with adults and peers and become better equipped to understand how their behavior impacts others. This encourages accountability, improves school safety, and helps students to develop skills so the school community can succeed.

Stated another way, both the theory and practice of RJ emphasize the importance of:

1. Identifying the harm.
2. Involving all stakeholders to their desired comfort level.
3. True accountability—taking steps to repair the harm and address its causes to the degree possible.”

For more, see Restorative Justice Resources for Schools --

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/restorative-justice-resources-matt-davis>

Note: Quick-fix conflict resolution interventions may restore a false sense of harmony at moments of confrontation, but they are insufficient and can backfire. Whatever is done initially, teachers, student support staff, and students themselves must follow-up with engaged dialogues about differences and commonalities. The long-term emphasis is on enhancing positive values about diversity and increasing opportunities for diverse and positive interactions and ongoing relationships.

For more on conflict resolution, see the

Rutgers Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution --

<http://cncr.rutgers.edu/conflict-resolution-at-school-on-the-playground/>

References Used in Developing this Resource

- Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2015). *Transforming student and learning supports: Developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system*. Los Angeles: Center for Mental Health in Schools. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf>
- Aronson, J. (2004). The threat of stereotype: *Educational Leadership*, 62, 14–19.
- Banks, J.A. & Banks, C.A.M. (Eds.), (1995). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Banks, J.A. (2014). *An introduction to multicultural education* (5th Edition). Santa Monica, CA: Pearson.
- Carbone II. (2010). Race, class, and oppression: Solutions for active learning and literacy in the classroom. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, 2(01). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=113>
- Center for Mental Health in Schools (2016). *Understanding diversity to better address barriers to learning*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/diversity.pdf>
- Center for Mental Health in Schools (2016). *Appreciating the impact of intersectionality in education settings using the example of females of color*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/intersect.pdf>
- Center for Mental Health in Schools (2016). *Students who are undocumented and identify as queer*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/lgbtq.pdf>
- Cherng, H.S., & Halpin, P.F. (2016). The importance of minority teachers: Student perceptions of minority versus white teachers. *Educational Researcher*, 45, 407-420.
- Cole, R.W. (ed.). (1995). *Educating everybody's children: Diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Craig, M.A., & Richeson, J.A. (2012). Coalition or derogation? How perceived discrimination influences intraminority intergroup relations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102, 759-777.
- Craig, M.A., & Richeson, J.A. (2014). More diverse yet less tolerant? How the increasingly-diverse racial landscape affects White Americans' racial attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, 750-761.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140, 139–167.
- D'Andrea, M., & Daniels, J. (2007). Addressing the problem of racism in school settings. *Counseling Today*. Online. <http://ct.counseling.org/2007/07/dignity-development-diversity-5/>
- Derman-Sparks, L., Higa, C. T., & Sparks, B. (1980). Children, race and racism: How race awareness develops. *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, 11, 3-15.
- Education Week Research Center. (2014). *A new majority in K-12*. Online. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/charts-a-new-majority-in-k-12.html>
- Equity Initiatives Unit, Office of Human Resources and Development (2010). *A resource for equitable classroom practices*. MD: Montgomery County Public Schools. <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/development/resources/ecp/ECP%20-%202008-13-10.pdf>
- Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood...and the rest of y'all too*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Frankenberg, E. (2013). The role of residential segregation in contemporary school segregation. *Education and Urban Society* 45, 548–570.
- Gaertner, S.L., & Dovidio, J.F. (2000). *Reducing intergroup bias: The common ingroup identity model*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, & practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ghosh, R., & Galczynski, M. (2014). *Redefining multicultural education: Inclusion and the right to be different* (3rd ed.). Canadian Scholars' Press. <http://www.canadianscholars.ca/books/redefining-multicultural-education-third-edition>

- Irwin, K. (2012) *Oppression in schools*. Online, <https://prezi.com/d74nr7by1jdw/oppression-in-schools/>
- Markus, H. R., & Conner, A. (2013). *Clash! 8 cultural conflicts that make us who we are*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Milner, H.R. (2013). Analyzing poverty, learning, and teaching through a critical race theory lens. *Review of Research in Education*, 37, 1-53
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (2015), *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd ed.), New York: Routledge.
- Pasque, P., Chesler, M., & Charbeneau, J. (2013). Pedagogical Approaches to Student Racial Conflict in the Classroom. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 6, 1-16.
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/dhe-a0031695.pdf> .
- Pew Research Center. (2015). *Modern immigration wave brings 59 million to U.S., driving population growth and change through 2065 views of immigration's impact on U.S. society mixed*. Online.
<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>
- Picower, R & Mayorga, E. (Eds) (2015) *What's race got to do with it? How current school reform policy maintains racial and economic inequality*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Quillian, L. (2014). Does segregation create winners or losers? Residential segregation and inequality in educational attainment. *Social Problems*, 61, 402-426.
- Reardon, S. F., and Owens, A. (2014). 60 years after Brown: Trends and consequences of school segregation. *Annual Review of Sociology* 40, 199-218.
- Sherif, M. (1961). *Intergroup conflict and cooperation; the Robbers Cave experiment*. Norman: University Book Exchange.
- Slavin, R. E. and Cooper, R. (1999), Improving intergroup relations: Lessons learned from cooperative learning programs. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55, 647–663.
- Spradlin, L., Parsons, D. (2008). *Diversity matters: Understanding diversity in schools*. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., & Greenfield, P. M. (2000). *Bridging cultures in our schools: New approaches that work. Knowledge Brief*. San Francisco: WestEd
- Umbreit, M. (2006). *Mediating interpersonal conflicts: Approaches to peacemaking for families, schools, workplaces, and communities*. Google Book.
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=XLNLAAwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP10&dq=conflict+mediation+in+schools&ots=INRuP5NfWR&sig=Tk9FCiWuHo2ntaRHZdSy-7NXQFc#v=onepage&q=conflict%20mediation%20in%20schools&f=false>
- Wages, M. (2015). *Culture, poverty, and education: What's happening in today's schools?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
- Welner, K. G. (2006). K-12 Race-conscious student assignment policies: Law, social science, and diversity. *Review of Educational Research*, 76, 349-382.
http://www.colorado.edu/education/sites/default/files/attached-files/Welner_K-12%20Race-Conscious%20Student%20Assignment%20Policies.pdf

Want more resources?

Talking to Our Children About Racism & Diversity –

http://www.civilrights.org/publications/reports/talking_to_our_children/?referrer=https://www.google.com/

Tips for Elementary School Teachers – <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/teach/elementips.htm>

Strategies for Reducing Racial and Ethnic Prejudice: Essential Principles for Program Design –

<http://www.tolerance.org/supplement/strategies-reducing-racial-and-ethnic-prejudice-essential-pr>

Bullying Quick Find – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/bully.htm>

Diversity Quick Find – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/diversity.htm>